



[Edward Said, 1935-2003](#)

The Fake “Other”

The fundamental question of philosophy is the relation between human and environment; or in other words, between mind and matter, or in philosophical terms, between Subject and Object.

Some philosophers, including the so-called “Post-Modernists” of our times, have considered that humans are products of circumstances, or effects of chemical processes, and do not have free will. In this view, human society is driven by forces outside its own consciousness, and beyond its control. These philosophers have consequently sometimes declared “The

Death of the Subject”, as if to say that all ideas of free will, and of the conscious, self-propelling human development know as Humanism, are out of date now; and this view suits the bourgeois class at this time.

James Heartfield’s 2002 book “[The ‘Death of the Subject’ explained](#)” deals with many different anti-Humanist theories and [concludes](#):

“Like Mark Twain’s death, reports of the ‘Death of the Subject’ are exaggerated. They have to be. The fulcrum point on which society turns is the freely willing subject. For all of the attempts to imagine a world without subjects, but only processes and objective forces, no developed society is conceivable without rationally-choosing individuals at its core.”

In our study of G W F Hegel we will have to return to the question of the relation between the Subject and the Object, because it is central to Hegel’s contribution to philosophy in general and to Marxism in particular. Hegel took this relation and made it dialectical; in other words, he showed how its development happens.

But for the time being we are still concerned with what Hegel is not, and we will use the attached Chapter 3 of Heartfield’s book (a downloadable file is linked below) to show why the by-now-commonplace concept of “The Other”, which appears in newspaper and magazine articles all the time, should not be attributed to Hegel, as much as Hegel does write about “the

other” in his books.

Hegel’s “other” is another other, as can be seen from Heartfield’s writing. Heartfield gives the 20th-century history of this confusion, and he is not the only writer to have done so.

The vulgar concept of “The Other” is a fixed, alien and threatening presence, real or imagined. In this imaginary framework, individuals and societies are believed to have their behaviour affected by fear of “The Other”, perhaps unjustly. So for example, in the example of Edward Said’s “Orientalism” that Heartfield begins with, Said’s complaint is found to be that the Muslims are wrongly treated as “Other”, when they are not actually “Other”. The Muslims are unjustly “Other”-ised, according to Said.

From a philosophical point of view Said could have better held that there is no such thing as “The Other” in this fixed sense.

Heartfield then goes further back to show that the origin of the undialectical concept of *“unbridgeable opposition between Self and Other”* is Paris, France, in the 1930s and 1940s, in the persons of Alexandre Kojève, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, among others. Kojève imported and popularized a fake version of Hegel’s philosophy, and it took on a life of its own, even penetrating down to popular bourgeois journalism, where “the other” has become a stock phrase, or cliché.

We will look at Hegel’s writing, including the famous Master-Slave dialectic, and we will see that, as with Ubuntu, the

Hegelian Self and Other are not in “unbridgeable” opposition but are instead intimately linked, to the extent that they are the condition for each other’s development, and as such, form a unity.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [The ‘Death of the Subject’ explained, 2002, C3, The Other, James Heartfield.](#)
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here.](#)